

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 03, 2003

The Honorable Don Nickles
Chairman
Senate Committee on the Budget
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kent Conrad
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on the Budget
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Nickles and Senator Conrad:

Ensuring the vitality of the child nutrition programs will be one of our key priorities over the coming year. Critically important child nutrition programs require reauthorization this year including: the School Breakfast Program, School Lunch Program, Special Milk Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Summer Food Service Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). Other related programs of interest to us include the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program and Team Nutrition (nutrition education and training).

We believe that it is essential to highlight and address two particularly important objectives as we review and reauthorize our child nutrition programs. First, we must ensure that these important programs provide eligible children across the nation with access to enough food of the right quality. Second, we must make sure that these programs have an impact on the staggering rates of overweight and obesity among our youth. Both of these objectives have short and long-term consequences for the health, education and well-being of our children and must serve as our primary guide for the re-authorization of the child nutrition programs.

To achieve these objectives, we request that you include increased funding in the Committee's Budget Resolution for the child nutrition programs in Fiscal Years 2004 through 2008 to provide for enactment of legislation to achieve the following:

- We strongly support action designed to reduce and/or contain overweight and obesity rates among children through the child nutrition programs. Issues to be addressed include: quality and nutritional content of school meals; increasing the availability of healthier foods in schools; expanding the availability of fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products; and enhancing nutrition education and physical activity programs.
- Eliminating the reduced-price category for school meals. Under current economic conditions, the three-tiered system of meal service (free, reduced-price, and paid) places the working poor at a disadvantage because they may not have even the forty cents it costs to pay for a reduced price meal. Children from these families should receive high quality free meals at school.

Carl Levin

Chin D. M.

Mark Dayton

Tom Kaschke
Chippewa

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Charles Schumer

Rou Wyden

John Breaux

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We thank you for your consideration and look forward to working with you to ensure a healthy and bright future for America's children

Sincerely yours,

Zombardi

Arden Smith
(wic)

Robert A. Minkoff

Patty Murray

Frank R. Lautenberg

Byron L. Dorgan

Blanche L. Linde

Jim Jeffords

Tom Rosten

Ed Kennedy

Patrick Leahy

Debbie Stabenow

Max Baucus

Paul Sarbanes

Jim Jeffords

Dick Durbin

Jack Reed
Samuel Alito

- Evaluating and, if needed, adjusting reimbursement rates for school meals and after-school programs, as the current rates have fallen significantly behind increased costs over the years.
- Extending the provision of current law that requires that "bonus" commodities donated to schools not be counted toward a minimum requirement that twelve percent of all school lunch assistance be in the form of commodities.
- Developing one application for all child nutrition programs and improving linkages between other low-income assistance programs and school meals.
- Expanding and simplifying the Summer Food Service and the Child and Adult Care Food Programs to serve children who currently do not have access to these critical programs - including expansion of the pilot supper program for low-income children that currently operates in seven states and the 13 state summer food program pilot that eases paperwork and provides the maximum reimbursement for all meals.
- Improving food safety in the school nutrition programs.
- Promoting the use of locally grown foods in school cafeterias.
- Re-examining the WIC program funding structure and considering the use of electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards, as is done with the Food Stamp Program.
- Expanding the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program.
- Ensuring child nutrition program integrity, as well as access by all eligible children.

The Congressional Budget Office was asked some time ago to estimate the cost of the changes listed above. Although we continue to wait for official estimates from CBO, the best estimate we currently have of the increased funding needed to make the above program improvements is \$1 billion annually, and that is the figure we are requesting. We believe that in the overall context of the budget, this relatively modest amount of money wisely spent now will significantly save healthcare dollars in the future. It is essential to make an investment in this area and we therefore urge the Committee to provide these increased resources in the Budget Resolution for the reauthorization of the child nutrition programs.